

JOHN & JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (WEST PARCEL),
BUILDING NO. 13-14
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5383-M

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PA
51-PHILA,
695M-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
JOHN AND JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (West Parcel), BUILDING 13/14
HABS No. PA-5383-M

Location:

4041-4055 Ridge Avenue
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

Present Owner:

Rouse Urban Housing, Inc.
1500 Walnut Street, 19th Floor
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102

Present Occupant:

Mixed commercial and industrial tenants.

Significance:

Building 13 is significant as one of the largest and oldest buildings on the Dobson west parcel. Its construction techniques and materials reflect those used consistently throughout the site.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

Date(s) of Erection:

1888. The building does not appear on Bromley's 1888 Philadelphia atlas but is shown on the 1889 Hexamer Survey for the Dobsons' Carpet Mill with an 1888 construction date.

Architect:

Unknown.

Original and Subsequent Owners:

See Chain of Title.

Builder, Contractor, Suppliers:

Unknown.

Original Plans and Construction:

No original plans or drawings have been located, however, the October 1889 Hexamer Survey shows the newly constructed building as Building 20. Building 13, as it is now known, was a rectangular, four-story stone structure with a slag roof. Specifications in the atlas indicate that the basement and first three stories of Building 13 were 11' in height with the fourth story 15' in height. The primary facade facing south had 25 bays, divided into sets of five or six windows separated by three bays of loading bays.

The interior floor plan of Building 13 appears to have had stairs accessing all floors at the west end and at the east. A fire escape was located on the eastern facade of the building terminating at the roof of the addition (Building 14) to Building 13. The first floor of the building was cement. On the atlas from 1889 the building is shown to have housed, on the first floor, operations for the brushing, burling, sewing and storage of fabrics, on the second floor "astrachan" and plush weaving, on the third floor warp dressing and on the fourth floor plush weaving and warping.

Alterations and Additions:

A one-story L-shaped stone building with a slag roof (Building 14), was constructed shortly after Building 13 and adjoins it at its eastern end. The building has industrial steel sash with brick arched lintels at the first floor and soldier course lintels at the second and third floors. The one-story "L" addition was expanded post-1925 with an additional two

stories. The addition housed washing and drying facilities for silk. In the mid-twentieth century, a change in grading raised the level at the rear of Building 13 and its addition over a full story in height. This change in grade allowed for a series of ramps to be built which provided vehicular access to the four stories of the building. The fill for the ramps was made available from the early 1960s Roosevelt Expressway Project.

B. Historical Context

Building 13/14 reflects the great expansion of the Dobsons' mill facilities in the late nineteenth century when the mill's employment rose from 1,900 in the 1880s to nearly 5,000 by 1895. The building's specialized use, for the processing of plush fabrics, documents the changing tastes of Americans during this period.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

Architectural Character:

Built on the northern edge of the west parcel of the Dobson Mill site, Building 13, retains its original form, with an addition, and local rubble schist construction reflective of the site and late-nineteenth-century mill architecture.

Condition of Fabric:

The building has severe structural problems due to the two-story infill at the rear of the structure. This infill has caused bowing at the exterior southern bearing wall as well as the decay of the structure's interior floor joists.

B. Description of Exterior

Overall Dimensions:

Building 13 - 208'x45.6', Building 14 - S elev.-24.8'; E elev.-20.2'; S elev.-23.8'; E elev.-25'; N elev.-48.6'; W elev.-45.6'.

Foundations:

Rubblestone.

Walls:

Randomly laid rubble relieved by brick arches. North elevation- first and second stories partially obscured by change in grade, simple wooden cornice. South elevation- 25-bays with simple wood cornice.

Structural System, Framing:

Stone relieved with large corner quoins, interior framing - central row of wooden posts carrying regularly spaced floor joists.

Porches, Stoops, Balconies, Bulkhead:

Concrete stoops and loading docks on north elevation, rubblestone platform with concrete deck to addition (Building 14).

Chimneys:

None.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

Double leaf and single-leaf metal doors, window openings altered to accommodate overhead garage doors with steel lintels and wood decks, supported on wood posts. Addition; (Building 14) - single-leaf metal door and two wood doors with glazed transoms, second story door accessed by exterior metal stair.

Windows/Shutters:

Industrial steel sash (mostly boarded over, some infilled some altered) with wood sash, jambs and moldings and arched brick lintels.

Roof:

Shape, Covering:

Low pitched gable of built up 4-ply.

Cornice, Eaves:

Simple wood box cornice.

C. Description of Interior

Floor Plans:

Basement: Rectangular. Other Floors: Rectangular, unpartitioned mill space divided by interior columns.

Stairways:

Interior stairs at eastern end of building.

Flooring:

Unfinished wood floors.

Wall/Ceiling Finishes:

Plaster walls, painted throughout. Ceilings are exposed timber and plank.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

No surviving original or historic interior doors.

Windows:

All windows recessed in unornamented plaster reveals with wood plank sills.

Decorative Features and Trim:

N/A

Hardware:

Original hardware, which is no longer extant, is presumed to have been utilitarian in character.

Mechanical Equipment:

Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: See PA-5383-C for heating system, air conditioning is N/A, ventilation by window mounted fans, exhaust ducts or air conditioning units.

Lighting: Modern, ceiling mounted electrical lights with diffusers.

Plumbing: Early-20th-century, ceiling mounted, sprinkler fire suppression system.

D. Site

General Setting and Orientation:

Building 13/14 defines the northern edge of the west parcel sitting at a higher grade than the entrance to the complex. Its primary facade faces south into the center of the complex.

Historic Landscape Design:

See Historic Context Section.

Outbuildings:

N/A.